

GAMES

FAQ

Q I've just got a new widescreen display, but some of my games look stretched on it. Is there anything I can do?

A PC games used to be displayed in almost square aspect ratios, either 4:3 or 5:4, to match most PC monitors. However, many of us now use widescreen monitors or HD TVs for gaming, which have wider 16:9 or 16:10 ratios.

Most recent releases such as Call of Duty 2 have options in the graphics properties screen that enable you to set the aspect ratio to match your display. However, older titles don't usually provide these options, so your widescreen display stretches the image to fill the screen, or puts black bars down either side to take up the excess space. There's often a way round this problem, but it varies from game to game and may be a hack, a patch, or a special command that you must enter.

Luckily, a website has compiled these fixes: visit www.widescreengamingforum.com to see if you can make your old games run in widescreen.

Seth Barton

Notebooks and video expert

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EA

Battlefield 2142

★★★★★

£25 inc VAT

Having developed multiplayer online shooters based on World War II, Vietnam and contemporary conflicts, it makes sense for EA to continue the successful Battlefield series by setting its latest first-person shooter in the future, with Battlefield 2142.

This is more a rethinking of Battlefield 2 than a revolution for the series. Gone are the modern tanks and helicopters, the American troops and Middle Eastern coalition. In their place is the coming of a second Ice Age, an array of semi-futuristic weaponry, hovering tanks and jump jet-powered air vehicles. The graphics have improved only marginally since the previous game, but they still impress even on lower-end machines.

Under the surface, the core gameplay is unchanged.

Two teams of up to 32 players each battle across a variety of excellently crafted maps on foot and in all manner of vehicles. Battlefield 2142's angular and hovering vision of futuristic engineering is a shade unoriginal, but the stars of this line-up are easily the giant walking tanks. These walkers look stunning and are veritable powerhouses. They tower over soldiers, whose only hope of disabling the hulking player-driven robots is to work together, one player disabling the walker with EMP while another straps explosives to its legs.

The biggest change from Battlefield 2, however, is the game's Titan mode. Players must complete a series of objectives to destroy the opposing team's Titan, a massive floating airship that dominates the sky. This involves lowering the opposing Titan's shields, before assaulting the undefended warship in launch



▲ Giant walking tanks are easily the most exciting part of life in the 22nd century

pods and destroying its core. It's a lot of fun and requires a degree of teamwork for any hope of victory.

Despite the range of modes, Battlefield 2142 can be unforgiving to new players. It uses a system that gives access to new weapons and tools the more you play, so until you've devoted some time to the game you'll be under-equipped compared with everyone else. Still, if you plan to get engrossed in Battlefield 2142, the unlockable equipment gives you something to aim for amid the endless battles. Sadly, the single-player mode is as terrible as ever, with no plot, characters or proper campaign mode to speak of. You simply fight a series of battles against unimpressive AI opponents. This game must be played online.

This is a fantastic game, but it can't be recommended to those who've yet to play a Battlefield title. Battlefield 2142 hasn't improved spectacularly on the previous game and, if anything, it's less accessible. If you want to work as part of a well-drilled team this is a great game, but those looking for an occasional online fight are better off with Battlefield 2.

Sam Nolan

SUMMARY

- ✓ Exciting gameplay
- ✓ Brilliant Titan mode
- ✗ Not newcomer-friendly

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER Requires Windows XP, 1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 4GB disk space, 128MB graphics card
PART CODE 132127
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS <http://battlefield2142.ea.com>

Top 5 games

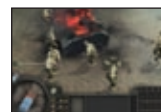
1. Company of Heroes

£25 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game looks fantastic, from the historically accurate units to the bombed-out French towns. But it's the innovative gameplay that makes it the best RTS around.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.thq.com FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



2. FIFA 2007

£23 inc VAT ★★★★★



The fully licensed teams and slick presentation have always been welcome, but FIFA 2007 is easier to play than its predecessor. Arguably, the best football game around.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com DETAILS <http://fifa07.ea.com> FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



3. FlatOut 2

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



FlatOut 2 has the most outrageous crashes in it that let you send your driver through the windscreen and into the road. It's also a brilliant racing game.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.flatoutgame.com FULL REVIEW Oct 2006



4. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



The most stunning role-playing game we've ever played. Graphics are amazing, and there's so much to it you could play it for a month and still have loads left to do.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com DETAILS www.elderscrolls.com FULL REVIEW Jul 2006



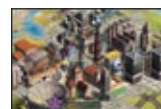
5. Civilization IV

£18 inc VAT ★★★★★



Play as God as you build a futuristic city from nothing. Plenty of warfare mixed with town planning and building means there's lots on offer for all types of game players.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.2kgames.com FULL REVIEW Jan 2006





▲ Skeletons or robots? Alive or dead? The Necron are most definitely evil, though

THQ
Warhammer
40,000: Dawn of
War – Dark Crusade

★★★★★

£18 inc VAT



This standalone expansion to the excellent Dawn of War RTS game continues the never-ending war in a dark future. It adds two new alien armies to the five forces from the original game and its first expansion, Winter Assault.

The Tau are a high-tech race that excel at ranged attacks and feature anime-styled battle suits that accommodate a variety of powerful weaponry. However, they are poor at hand-to-hand fighting and use more primitive races, such as the bird-like Kroot, to supplement their forces. The Necron are the sci-fi equivalent of an undead horde. They rise from their robotic tombs to make a slow but terrifying advance on their enemies. They may be slow, both in movement and in obtaining weapon upgrades, but they are hard to kill.

As well as the new armies, there's an enhanced single-player campaign mode, which takes the form of a Risk-style map of the planet Kronus, with each territory representing a specific battlefield. Conquer new territories by winning battles against the defenders. This gives a nice continuity to single-player games, but can't compete with the deeper gameplay of Medieval 2: Total War (reviewed far right).

The battles are immediately satisfying. Dawn of War keeps things quick and violent, with strategic points concentrating the fighting in small areas. The graphics look technically accomplished, and the seven factions vary in their style of play and have genuine character.

This is a bargain if you've never played Dawn of War before. You can use only the Tau and Necron forces in online games unless you have the original game. Still, one of the best and most accessible RTS games of recent years has been polished into something exceptional.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good graphics
- ✓ Seven varied armies to play
- ✗ Campaign mode is simplistic

REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.8GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 2.5GB disk space
PART CODE B000FN9NH5
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS www.dow-darkcrusade.com



▲ Looks like someone's been at the pickled beetroot again

VIVENDI
F.E.A.R.
Extraction Point

★★★★★

£18 inc VAT

Extraction Point is the expansion pack to the superb F.E.A.R., which received a Best Buy award in *Shopper* January 2006. The action continues in much the same vein, with slow-motion gunplay and Japanese horror references aplenty. Your supernatural nemeses are back, and so are the swarms of replicant troops.

For the uninitiated, F.E.A.R. places you in the boots of an elite soldier blessed with a superhuman power: the ability to move really fast. Pressing the Ctrl button throws the action into a hazy slow motion, giving you time to pick off multiple enemies. There's nothing quite as satisfying as gliding into a room, tapping Ctrl, dispatching several enemies with a few well-placed bullets and finishing off the final replicant with a flying roundhouse kick.

Extraction Point, like its predecessor, uses every cheap scare tactic in the book and should get to even the most hardened horror fan. The audio production is brilliant, generating a tense atmosphere. Drips, clunks and the distant hum of machinery punctuate the gloomy silence, and by the time you've spent a few minutes navigating through the shadowy environments you'll be jumping at the slightest noise.

The environments show no more imagination than before. It's the usual tour of duty around endless warehouses and industrial buildings, punctuated by a trip outside to a car park. While they may be drab, though, they look incredible. With a powerful PC, F.E.A.R. is still one of the best looking games around.

Extraction Point delivers more of the tried and tested F.E.A.R. formula, but with a couple of new enemies and a few new weapons such as a limb-severing laser gun. If you enjoyed the original game, this provides more of the same. It's just a pity there isn't a little more deviation from the original template.

Sasha Muller

SUMMARY

- ✓ Gorgeous graphics
- ✓ Great fights and better frights
- ✗ Over too quickly

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space
PART CODE 132133
SUPPLIER www.game.co.uk
DETAILS www.whatisfear.com



▲ There's a lot more to this game than huge battles and castle sieges

SEGA
Medieval 2:
Total War

★★★★★

£25 inc VAT

Medieval times offered a fantastic variety of troop types and technology, from peasants with pointy sticks through to rifled mortars. Little surprise, then, that Creative Assembly has returned to this era for Medieval 2: Total War. This game is more complex, engaging and enthralling than its excellent predecessor.

The formula will be familiar to fans of the series. You take control of a state seeking to dominate Europe in the medieval era. You select from five initial states – England, France, The Holy Roman Empire, Spain and Venice – and unlock 12 more as you defeat them. Each state has a different financial setup, goals, special units and, in some cases, religion, making for a different experience each time you play.

The game operates on two levels. The larger top level offers Civilization-style strategy, where you upgrade cities to produce various units. There are lots of features to tinker with. You can use diplomacy, for example, or try assassination. Armies roam Europe, led by royal family members. When they meet, you can resolve battles automatically or take control.

Battles use the biggest and best 3D battle simulator we've ever seen, with thousands of troops onscreen at once. They fire catapults and cannons, fight on horseback and unleash lethal volleys of arrows. The level of detail is fantastic, allowing you to zoom in and see individuals fighting, or zoom out and take control of the grand strategy. Naval battles and sieges are also represented, while a sweeping soundtrack adds to the sense that an epic drama is unfolding.

This is an excellent game and well worth the investment of time required. However, if you're looking for something more immediate, try Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Dark Crusade (reviewed left).

Evan Knowles

SUMMARY

- ✓ The biggest battles you'll see on a PC
- ✓ Brilliant Civilization-style strategy
- ✗ Time-consuming

REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 11GB disk space
PART CODE BMOX2
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS www.totalwar.com